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On Other Pages

BBC Birth Control Broadcast Scheduled Despite Opposition . . . . . Page 2
Merger Possibilities Cited for Brazilian Presbyterians . . . . . Page 2
Canadian Baptists Reject WCC Membership Move . . . . . Page 3
Yugoslav Communist Sets Limits for Church . . . . . Page 3
Russian Church Visitors Conclude Geneva Visit . . . . . Page 4
Agreement on Church Government Held Necessary for Mergers . . . . . Page 4
In Brief . . . . . Page 5

Missouri Synod Approves Unity Talks with New Church

(San Francisco) - The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has unanimously called for talks looking towards a "God-pleasing unity and fellowship" with the new American Lutheran Church to be formed next April by the merger of three Lutheran churches (see EPS No. 11).

The resolution in effect approves continuation of doctrinal discussions which the Missouri Synod has been carrying on for several years with the present American Lutheran Church, which is one of the three merging bodies and will give its name to the new church. The other two bodies involved in the merger plans are the Evangelical and the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

In other action the body's triennial convention:

Decided to send observers to the 1961 assembly of the World Council of Churches and future meetings of the Lutheran World Federation and the National Association of Evangelicals because "experience has shown that our presence ... is of value in keeping us informed on the church world". The synod is not a member of any of these groups;

Deferred action on the question of whether to join either the National Lutheran Council or the Lutheran World Federation until its doctrinal unity committee completes current studies of the two;

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Reaffirmed its historic position that granting women the right to vote, to preach or publicly to teach men in the congregation would be contrary to the will of God. It said women "should be directed into, and led to find opportunity for, service in the Church where their potential of talent is fully utilized in harmony with Scriptural principles";

Authorized establishment of a library of ecumenical information for editors, of periodicals, other individuals and groups in the Church;

Granted independent status for, and recognized as a sister church, the 31,000 member India Evangelical Lutheran Church, warning it at the same time that fellowship will continue only as long as it remains in doctrinal agreement with the synod. EPS, Geneva

BBC Birth Control Broadcast Scheduled Despite Opposition

(London) - A BBC radio broadcast on birth control apparently will take place as scheduled despite sharp opposition.

The broadcast seemed virtually assured when Mr. Ernest Marples, the Postmaster General, refused to yield to demands that he exercise his power to ban the programme and referred it as a matter for decision by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The controversial programme is scheduled for August 23 as one of a series in "The Week's Good Cause" by the Bishop of Southwark on behalf of the Family Planning Association.

Opposition to the programme was voiced by a member of the House of Commons who is on the council of an organization called the Catholic Union. He argued that the association is "highly questionable" because, he alleged, it advises married women "to go in for contraception and birth control without the advice or permission of their husbands".

A second speaker, Mr. Patrick Maitland, urged that all such "controversial practices as euthanasia, abortion and birth control" be banned from the series.

The "Manchester Guardian" applauded Mr. Marples' position in an editorial and noted that the Family Planning Association "is an eminently worthy body which fully deserves an appeal on its behalf. Much of the criticism of its work is based on ignorance", it commented.

The editorial also noted that the power of the Postmaster General to ban broadcasts "is intended only for national emergencies and it would be entirely wrong" to use it in this instance. EPS, Geneva

Merger Possibilities Cited for Brazilian Presbyterians

(Rio de Janeiro) - The hope that "eventual reunion" of the two major Presbyterian bodies in Brazil may result from their joint activities in planning the 100th anniversary of Presbyterianism in the country has been voiced in a bulletin published by the two bodies.

The publication, issued in connection with the observance, points to the possibility that "this experience of cooperation" may lead to a reunion which would end the 56-year rift between the 110,000-member Presbyterian Church of

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Brazil and the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil, which has 35,000 members.

The bulletin emphasizes the numerous cooperative activites planned in connection with the observance, including publication of a magazine and sponsorship of a weekly radio programme. Both will also participate in sessions of the 18th General Council of the World Presbyterian Alliance, July 27 - August 6, at Sao Paulo, for which the larger body will act as official host.

The observance marks the 100th anniversary of the arrival in the country of the first Presbyterian missionary, the Rev. Ashbel G. Simonton, who established its first Presbyterian Church, edited its first magazine, participated in the formation of the first Presbytery and founded its first seminary. There are at present four Presbyterian bodies in the country. The other two are the Conservative Presbyterian Church, which withdrew from the Independent Church in 1940 and claims 20 congregations and an ultra-fundamentalist church formed in 1956, which has about 1,000 members and is affiliated with the International Council of Christian Churches. EPS, Geneva

Canadian Baptists Reject WCC Membership Move

(Kingston, Ont.) - The Baptist Federation of Canada has rejected a proposal that it "re-study its relations" with the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement.

The vote came after a spirited debate in which opponents of the measure argued that it would alienate the federation's relations with the Southern Baptist Convention in the US, because the "one thing the SBC holds against us is our attitude toward ecumenicity".

The proposal, which was made as an amendment to a resolution on church union, had called "for prayer for divine guidance concerning the unity of Christ's Church". As adopted, the resolution stated that Baptists are not clear as to the best way to unity, and recommended "harmony and cooperation" with ministers and people of other church bodies. The action was taken at the federation's Fifth Triennial Assembly held at Kingston, Ont. The federation is a member of the Canadian Council of Churches, but does not belong to the World Council of Churches.
EPS, Geneva

Yugoslav Communist Sets Limits for Church

(Belgrade) - A top Yugoslav Communist Party official has declared that there is a strong conviction that the Roman Catholic Church "should be limited exclusively to its pastoral work" in the country.

The remark has been generally interpreted in Western church circles as forecasting a tightening of government restrictions against Yugoslav Roman Catholic activities.

The speaker was Miha Marinko, a member of the Politburo of the Yugoslav Communist Party. He addressed the opening session of a recent Communist Party Congress at Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Mr. Marinko alleged that "certain political and church circles abroad" are still trying to use the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia for "anti-Socialist activities. "However", he said, there is "small possibility" for their success because of the government's "correct policy towards the Church and the religious feeling of the faithful". EPS, Geneva

Russian Church Visitors Conclude Geneva Visit

(Geneva) - Two representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church have concluded a four-weeks' "get acquainted" visit to the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva. It was the first visit of its kind.

Before their departure they voiced the hope that the visit will result in "closer relationships" between the WCC and the Russian Patriarchate.

The visitors were Archpriest Vitaly M. Borovoy, of Vilna, a lecturer in early church history at the Leningrad Theological Academy and Mr. Victor S. Alexeev, a lay secretary in the Moscow Patriarchate's office for inter-church relations.

The Russian churchmen said they had been "very favourably impressed with everything" they saw. They said a report on their visit will be made at a meeting of the Moscow Patriarchate's synod to be held in early August.

They said they did not know who would be chosen to represent the Patriarchate as "observers" at the World Council's Central Committee meeting, August 17 - 29, but that the decision would be made at the August meeting. They also declared that it is not yet known whether Metropolitan Nikolai, the second ranking leader of the Russian Church, will attend.

During their visit the churchmen conferred with World Council officials and also studied the work of the organization's various departments and divisions.

On their arrival they presented to the WCC library, on behalf of Metropolitan Nikolai, a collection of several theological books, which WCC officials said marks the beginning of an exchange of books and periodicals.

The books, which will form the nucleus of a new WCC collection on the Russian Orthodox Church, include reprints of the major liturgical publications, Trebnik and Typikon, a liturgical calendar, a lectern Bible and New Testament and Psalms for family use, a collection of private prayers and various other church publications. It also includes copies of recent speeches and sermons by His Holiness Patriarch Alexius and Metropolitan Nikolai.

The visit resulted from a meeting at Utrecht, the Netherlands, last August, when representatives of the Patriarchate expressed a desire "to get first-hand information" on the World Council.

A reciprocal visit to Moscow is planned, probably in December, by a delegation of World Council representatives, headed by Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, general secretary. The Russian Orthodox Church is not a member of the World Council of Churches.

EPS, Geneva

Agreement on Church Government Held Necessary for Mergers

(London) - Dr. Geoffrey Francis Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, said in London that agreement on the form of government is vital in any consideration of union between churches with episcopal and presbyterian systems of authority.

Referring to the recent rejection by the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) of "bishops in presbytery" proposed as a move towards unity with Anglican churches in England and Scotland, Dr. Fisher said that the question is not one in which just these two churches are involved, but is of concern to all churches.

He said that the Church of Scotland in rejecting the proposal had "obviously felt that there was in the proposals some denial of its full place in the general Church of Christ and some slur cast upon its ministry.

"For myself, I do not think that any question of superior or inferior, greater or less, should arise between equally honest and sincere and competent disciples of our Lord", he declared. "The present position of the churches of the Anglican communion is that they seek humbly to offer their episcopal inheritance as part of their treasures which they can give to the enrichment of reuniting churches, just as every other church is invited and expected to offer its treasures also".

Dr. Fisher also urged that there be "further exploration" of the issue. The proposal was turned down by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland by a vote of 300 to 266 because it was held to imply "a denial of the catholicity of the Church of Scotland and of the validity and regularity of its ministry within the Church Catholic". EPS, Geneva

In Brief

Revision of the French Roman Catholic catechism to add careless driving to the list of grave sins is being contemplated by the church, according to the bulletin of the Paris Archdiocese. The bulletin said it is likely the next revised edition will include a section in the chapter on "The Respect for Life" which will define as a grave sin actions in which a person "kills himself or kills somebody else through imprudence, speed excess or disobedience under the highway code".

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Prof. K.E. Skydsgaard of the University of Copenhagen, an internationally known scholar in dogmatic theology, has been named to begin the Lutheran World Federation's programme of research into the theology of Roman Catholicism and other Christian confessions. His work will mark the initial stage of the eventual programme of the LWF-sponsored Foundation for Inter-Confessional Research, for which detailed plans are now being drafted.

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Japanese Gideons, who since 1950 have distributed one million copies of the Bible or Scripture portions, recently presented Crown Prince Akhito with a specially inscribed Bible, to mark the beginning of their drive towards a second million distribution mark.

* *

AVACO (Christian Audio Visual Centre) of Japan has announced it will conduct a comprehensive study of the role and rationale of audio visual aids and mass communications media in evangelism and education. The study will commemorate the joint anniversary in the country of AVACO's tenth year of work and of 100 years of Protestant evangelism. Reports from the study, in which theologians, psychologists, sociologists and mass communications specialists will participate, will be published.

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What is believed to be the first World Council of Churches' flag in existence was dedicated on Whitsunday by Christ Church, Cincinnati, Ohio, (US). The flag which carries the official WCC symbol, with the word "Oikoumene" in white letters against a blue field, is the fourth of a matching set of flags displayed at the altar of the church. The others are the flags of the United States, the Protestant Episcopal Church and the United Nations.

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The Rev. Harvey W. Hollis, executive secretary of the Denver, Colo. Area Council of Churches has been elected president of the Association of Council of Churches Secretaries (USA). He succeeds Dr. Forrest L. Knapp, of Boston, general secretary of the Massachusetts Council of Churches.

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Plans for building a $3,500,000 college in Western Nigeria within the next five years have been announced by the Southern Baptist (US) mission in Lagos, Nigeria.

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The East German Ministry for State Security maintains a special section to spy on the churches and other religious organizations, according to West Berlin Senator for the Interior, Dr. Joachim Lipschitz. He said espionage activities are conducted not only in the Soviet Zone, but also in West Berlin and West Germany and are controlled by the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity (Communist) Party and financed by a large budget.

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Archimandrite Jerome Kotsonis, chaplain at the Greek Royal Palace, has been appointed by the University of Thessaloniki as professor of canon law and pastoral theology in its School of Theology. A member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, he is the founder of many Christian social and charitable organizations and the author of numerous books.

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The possibility of any re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Greece has been vigorously denied in a statement by the theological faculty of the University of Athens. The statement was prompted by radio commentators' speculations that the recent state visit of King Paul and Queen Frederika to the Vatican might result in establishment of formal ties. It said, "no relation should be allowed ... except discussions on purely theological grounds". The visit was later described as part of "international tradition", in which the royal couple paid their "personal respects to the leader of the Roman Catholic Church" without signifying any obligation.

* *

Some three hundred representatives of six churches recently held the first major ecumenical meeting in Rosario, Argentina. The guest speaker was Bishop Sante Uberto Barbieri, bishop of the Central Conference of the Methodist Church in Argentina and a president of the World Council of Churches. Major Carlos Bembhy of the Salvation Army presided. Represented were the Anglican Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the United Lutheran Church, the German Evangelical Synod of the River Plate, the Salvation Army and the Methodist Church. The group is now planning the organization of the Friends of the World Council of Churches Association.

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The murder of a Protestant Indian lay teacher in Tierrandentro, "because of his religion", has been reported by the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia. A confederation news bulletin says that "investigation has confirmed" that the victim, Sr. Florentino Pacho, died as the result of injuries sustained when he was "furiously attacked from behind by a Roman Catholic Indian" while instructing a fellow-Protestant in the Gospel. It said the murderer is still at liberty "although his whereabouts are known". The victim was reported to be about 46 years old, married and the father of three children. The confederation said "he was an honest and respected Indian who had often served his church, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, as a lay preacher in the Indian tongue". EPS, Geneva